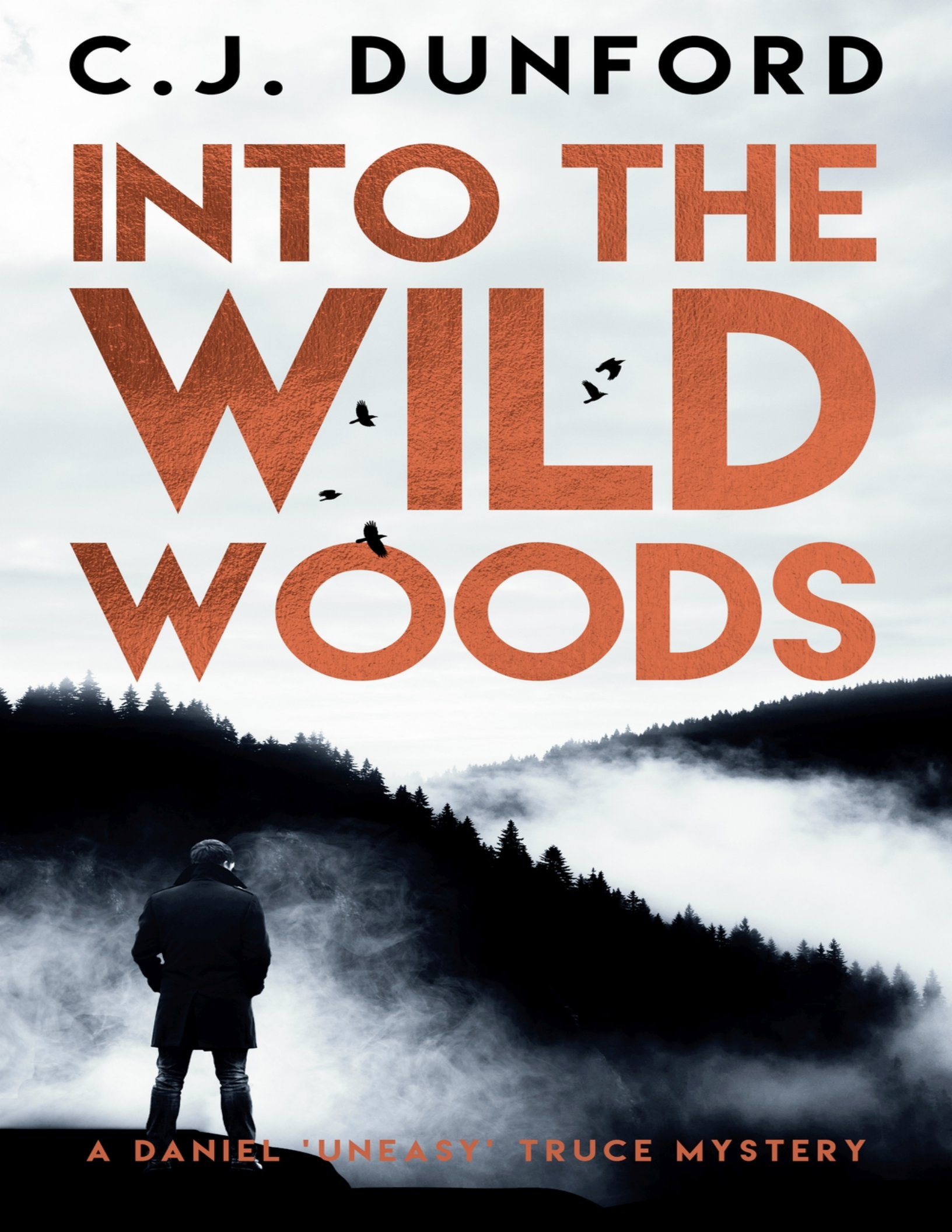


C. J. DUNFORD

**INTO THE
WILD
WOODS**



A DANIEL 'UNEASY' TRUCE MYSTERY

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About the Book

Another case for Daniel Truce: Patricia Green, a 17-year-old girl, has been missing for 48 hours. The team on site have no leads and have asked the Edinburgh special unit for help. At first, everyone assumes that she has run away. But Truce digs deeper and finds out that Patricia has a secret boyfriend, much older than her. He also hears rumours about parties at Blaine Forest — a place with an unpleasant reputation, where once women accused of witchcraft were hung. Ten years ago, a young girl from the same school hanged herself there, and only one year ago, it was the site of a murder-suicide of a young couple. Is it possible that the cases are connected?

Into the Wild Woods is the second book in the *Daniel 'Uneasy' Truce Mystery* series.

About the Author

C.J. Dunford is one of Caroline Dunford's pseudonyms. She lives in Scotland in a cottage by the sea with her partner and her two young sons. As all authors are required to have as much life experience as possible she has been, at various times, a drama coach, an archery instructor, a counsellor, a qualified psychotherapist, a charity worker, a journalist, a voice actor, a hypnotherapist, and a playwright. Today she writes mainly novels, the odd (often very odd) short story, theatre plays, the occasional article, teaches and mentors. She can't remember a time when she didn't write or tell stories and seriously doubts that she could remain sane if she stopped doing so.

Readers can connect with C.J. Dunford on various social media platforms:



C.J. DUNFORD

INTO THE WILD WOODS

A Daniel 'Uneasy' Truce Mystery



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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. This book is written in British English.

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CHAPTER 1

“Thanks, Dr Morton. I’ll see you next week.”

Daniel Truce closes the psychiatrist’s door gently behind him. He hasn’t worked out why, but it feels necessary to close the door silently. Obviously, storming out would make an impression, but not the one he wants. Instead, under the mild, grey eyes and soft voice of Dr Andrea Morton, he has lied consistently and calmly until he is sure that she believes him when he tells her he is getting better.

When they first met, Dr Morton had invited him to call her Andrea, but he hadn’t liked that at all. He’d noticed she had been very nervous. Her left hand kept going to her throat. On one occasion she had played on and off for the whole session with her pendant. Of course, she maintains open body language and is impressively controlled in her facial expressions, but Truce notices each time her breathing rhythm changes, her pupils dilate, her skin flushes the palest pink and even when she tenses the muscles in her legs to prevent herself from turning her feet away from him, which, to the knowledgeable, like Truce, would indicate her distaste.

Now she is comfortable with him, or as comfortable as she can be with a police officer who was once in the military and when deployed in the Middle East saw his best friend get blown up in an explosion that almost killed him too. Truce thought for the first few weeks it was the graphic nature of the incident that upset Dr Morton, but later he’s come to understand it’s the fact he’s a trained killer who’s mad that bothers her. The two in combination appear to be her worst-case scenario. But Truce has never

yet met anyone that, given sufficient time, he can if not exactly make them like him, at least make them feel that he is safe to be around. It's no coincidence that his army nickname was 'Uneasy'.

"So how did it go?" Leighton asks him as he walks down the corridor towards the car park.

"Weren't you listening?"

Leighton gives one of his characteristic shrugs. His red hair is spiked today, as it was when he went through his punk phase as a teenager. His chin is covered in a ruddy five o'clock shadow and he looks tired. "I thought it best to keep a low profile when El Mortona is around."

They reach the door to the car park. "Why do you call her that?" asks Truce.

'Not quite worked it out yet," says Leighton. "I wanted to make it a play on *morte* — you know, like in the French for death. But that doesn't quite work, so I'm trying it in Spanish."

"You don't speak Spanish," says Truce opening the door. The light is overly bright against a fresh fall of snow. The wind is piercing, but the air has a clean, icy fresh smell that Truce finds invigorating. Leighton vanishes as Truce crunches across the light dusting towards his car. It's been snowing since he arrived an hour and ten minutes ago. Truce unlocks the Audi and reaches into the glove compartment for the scraper. The heated windows will make short work of light snow, but Truce dutifully scrapes clear the roof of his car. "Haven't seen snow like this for years," he says to Leighton. He receives no reply.

He gets in the car and turns on the heating. While he is waiting for the windows to clear, he turns on his phone and checks for messages. Inevitably there is one from Rose. She wants him back "urgently". Truce can't think of anything he has done recently to annoy his commanding officer, so presumes they must have a new case. He looks at the time of the call. It was mid-way through his session. Rose is

aware he's still seeing the police psychiatrist at the same time every week, but she still tried to call him during his so-called sacred therapy time. Truce sighs and puts the car into drive. He feels the slight shiver as the car moves off with the merest of sideways movements and is glad he went for the extra performance tyres. Driving on snow, he's discovering, is completely unlike driving on sand.

Rose indicated in her message that she is waiting, without patience, for him back at their base, affectionately known as the Barn. It's a new building, deep in the heart of Fife, where land is cheap and ticks the 'outreach' policing box, even though there is no town nearer than five miles.

Truce drives through the long, wide streets of large sandstone houses, darkened with age and pollution, half hidden behind their high privacy hedges and obligatory two cars in each driveway. Then it is on to the A road that runs through the countryside. His mind is only half focused on the drive. A part of it is looking ahead for hazards, the other part is reviewing his session with Dr Morton. Almost before he notices it, he's passing the large public house on the left, which is old enough to once have been a staging house where carriages changed horses before starting on the long trek around the Forth. Truce always notices the building. He loves the thought that people have been stopping there for centuries.

Now he only has to cross the Bridge. The new one has finally opened. It sweeps elegantly up and across the Forth. Along the sides run high slatted barriers that make the sea beneath shimmer as he drives past. Equally spaced, the strong steel ropes are evenly angled running along its centre, exuding strength and confidence. Truce finds the new suspension bridge to be a thing of beauty; form and function in perfect harmony.

North Queensferry is already alight, fending off the early afternoon winter gloom. The sky seems lower, full of the promise of more snow. Truce hopes whatever Rose has

for him isn't too far away. Right now, he'd like nothing more to be back in his Edinburgh apartment, feet up on his coffee table and sipping a good single malt in the warmth, as he watches the flurries fall outside. He hopes Boots has found some shelter. Leighton's right, he should see about getting a cat flap installed.

The undulating Fife countryside is covered in a thick frosting of snow, so perfect, it looks as if it has been iced by an invisible giant. The nearside lane of the roads is clear, but that's all the snowplough has managed. Truce sticks carefully to the clear road, which to him already feels as if the ice has started to reform. He is not making good time, but even Rose can't complain in this weather. He's about twelve miles away when he sees a flash of red in his rear-view mirror. Then he's overtaken by a speeding Toyota Rav4 in the outside lane. It's flying by. Truce wonders if it's possible to aquaplane on ice. He considers turning on his sirens and chasing the idiot, but while he realises the driver is a menace to other travellers, he can't help but feel his erratic and poor driving skills would only make a high-speed chase a greater danger to anyone else foolish enough to be driving in this weather. He thinks Leighton would say something like he hopes the guy crashes and burns before he hurts anyone else. Truce feels guilty he can't stop what he's certain is an accident in motion.

He's five miles out, passing through the last village of stern-faced houses disapprovingly abutting the road, when the snow starts falling again. He slows down and turns on his windscreen wipers. So far only a smattering of snowflakes is blowing across the road. But the fact that they are moving sideways suggests the wind-chill factor remains significant. By the time he pulls into the Barn's carpark Truce is cursing Rose with all the inventiveness he learned from Middle Eastern curses. "Her mind is low and dirty like a shoe" is by far the mildest.

The asphalt of the carpark, obviously cleared earlier in the day, is once again becoming covered with a light layer of snow. Great, thinks Truce, it's lying. A nightmare scenario of being trapped in the Barn overnight with Rose flashes through his mind. It's vivid enough that he seriously considers heading straight home. He suppresses the urge. He's almost certainly been seen from the building. He pulls up into his space and sees a red Rav4 parked next to him. Cooper. He isn't surprised by his colleague's reckless driving, but more annoyed that Cooper got here first.

Rose's office door is open, and she is standing in the doorway pouting. Her blonde hair is pulled back in a tight bun, and her features seem sharper than usual. Her body language is closed and tense. *Wicked Witch of the North* springs so clearly into Truce's mind that for a horrible moment he thinks he has said it out loud.

"Finally," she says. "Don't you realise there's a storm coming? None of us want to get stuck here." Implicit in her tone is that the snow is Truce's fault.

"I got here as quickly and as safely as I could, ma'am," he says, keeping his tone neutral and his arms loose by his side.

Rose jerks her head towards her office. "Get in here," she says. She turns and walks inside with short staccato steps. Truce follows her.

Cooper and Wendy are already there. Cooper gives him a goofy grin. "Took your time, Truce," he says. "Need a refresher driving course? I could give you some tips."

"No, thanks," says Truce quietly, sitting in the chair between him and Wendy. "I'm fond of staying alive."

Wendy gives him a quizzical look. Her pupils are wide. The deep-blue irises are dilated. Truce catches the image of

his face in her pupils. He hopes this is a display of affection and not due to the darkening skies. He smiles back and gives a slight shake of his head. Her red hair is drawn back into a pony tail and her face is whiter than normal. Truce surmises that she too has been pulled in from elsewhere. "Where were you?" he asks.

"Cut the chit-chat," says Rose. She sits behind the empty acreage of her desk and surveys them. "We have a missing child."

All of them sit up straighter in their seats.

"How old?" Wendy voices the question that is on all their minds.

"Seventeen," says Rose.

"Hardly a child," says Cooper.

"A least someone old enough to hopefully find shelter if they're lost in the storm," says Truce. "And large enough not to go into instant hypothermia."

"Why are they calling us in?" says Cooper. "Dogs can do more in the snow than Truce."

Truce lets the insult pass. He wants to hear this too.

"How long has she been missing?" asks Wendy. "What's her background?"

Rose pulls open a drawer. She takes out a folder, opens it and begins to read. "Patricia Green, seventeen, straight A student. Lives in St Blaine's, a small town in Perthshire."

"Shit," says Cooper, "You aren't going to ask us to go up there tonight, are you, boss?"

Rose eyes him levelly. "You've seen the weather, detective. If you don't go up tonight I doubt you'll get up there this week." Cooper opens his mouth to protest again, but Rose cuts him off. "Need I remind you that a young girl's life is at risk? It's our job to find her."

"What makes the local force feel they can't cope?" asks Truce.

"She's already been missing for forty-eight hours," says Rose.

“Shit,” says Cooper again. “We all know what that means. If there’s been no ransom demand, she’s either run away or she’s dead. It’s too late.”

“Has there been a ransom demand?” asks Truce.

“If it’s not too much to ask I’d like to finish the briefing,” says Rose. Her eyes flicker, harsh as flints. “The girl comes from a good background. Excellent attendance at the local school. Her father is the local Justice of the Peace.”

Cooper throws his hands melodramatically in the air.

“Something to say, Detective Cooper?” says Rose.

Cooper mutters something that sounds like a growl but shakes his head.

Rose continues. “The local police have no leads, so we’ve been asked to step in and help. See what our specialist abilities can turn up.” She looks at them over the top of the folder. “I don’t need to remind you that our annual budget review is due shortly, and what that means.”

“No, ma’am,” say Wendy and Cooper in unison.

Truce is blindsided. “I thought we had funding for the next five years,” he says.

“The unit does,” says Rose. She adds, “I do.”

Truce waits for more, but nothing is said. Wendy and Coop are looking at their feet. Truce rises. “How many cars are we going to take over?” he says. “St Blaine’s is northwest of here, isn’t it?”

Wendy nods. “Only slightly north, but we’re better going across than round by the Bridge again.”

“You can all travel with me,” says Coop.

“No,” says Truce.

“We should have more than one car,” says Wendy. “I’ll go with Truce.” She smiles.

“I don’t care how you get there,” says Rose, “but get there fast. I’ll expect regular reports.” She hands the file to Wendy, picks up her phone and begins to scroll through it. The others wait until she raises her head and stares at them. Then they all jump at once, and Truce thinks, almost

like a comedy show, they rush to the door at the same time. Coop gets out first, largely because Truce and Wendy hold back slightly to avoid brushing up against him. As ever the faint aroma of stale sweat hangs around him.

In the car park Wendy takes a small bag from the boot of her car. Truce opens his boot for her. She laughs. "You already worked out you need to carry an in-case bag?"

Truce smiles at the pun. "Always have. That's the army for you."

They get into the car and Truce turns the heating on full. "I was surprised you wanted to drive up with me," he says. He pulls carefully out of the carpark and onto the road. The snowfall is still light, but he needs to use his windscreen wipers.

"I don't like driving on snow much," says Wendy. "Besides, have you seen Coop drive?"

"He overtook me on the way here," says Truce.

"He's not got over his wife leaving," says Wendy. "I think he's finding life empty. Adrenaline makes him feel alive. Unfortunately, the way he's seeking it, he may achieve the opposite."

Truce risks a sidelong glance at her. "Do you analyse everyone you work with?"

"I try not to," says Wendy. "And it's not exactly analysing, if you want to be technical, but it's hard."

"Like me trying to turn off automatically reading body language?"

"Pretty much. Though I make an extra effort not to read people I've slept with. Especially when they're driving in difficult conditions."

Truce catches his breath. "You don't analyse that, do you?"

"Were you reading my body language at the time?"

"No," says Truce.

"Liar," says Wendy and laughs.

Truce smiles. "In the interests of transparency and clear communication I should tell you I'm probably giving off signs of being worried and that's nothing to do with you."

"I want you to be concerned about the snow," says Wendy.

Truce shakes his head. "I'm worried about Boots."

"Boots?"

"The stray cat that's adopted me. I was going to call Leighton and ask him to feed her and then I remembered ..." he breaks off. He feels disloyal discussing Leighton with her.

"What does Dr Morton say about him?"

"Nothing much." He puts on a finicky voice. "It's all part of the process."

Wendy grins. "Yeah, I guess all therapists can sound a bit bollocks at times."

"A bit?"

Wendy can't suppress a snigger. Her phone pings. She checks it while Truce internally sighs with relief that they've moved on from Leighton.

"That was the unit admin. They've got you and me into a B&B in St Blaine's. Nothing about Cooper."

"Maybe they're expecting him to camp."

"Yeah, I can just see him in his Boy Scout outfit," says Wendy.

Truce turns to grin at her. "This is nice," he says. "We haven't had much opportunity to talk like this for a while."

"I've been giving you space," says Wendy. "Besides, it's not nice. Imagine being a teenager stuck out in this."

Truce shrugs slightly. He realises he's gripping the wheel too tightly and tries to relax. "I'd have been fine," he says. "I was always self-reliant. I had to be — growing up in the orphanage and all those foster homes."

"Homes plural?" asks Wendy.

"I thought you'd read my file."

“The entry on your juvenile years was brief. It was mostly about your army service.”

“Yeah, homes, plural. I found it hard to fit in as a kid. Do you think that’s what happening with this girl? Home trouble?”

“Good change of subject,” says Wendy. “Possibly. I’m trying not to assume anything. I want to get on scene with an open mind.” Out of his peripheral vision Truce sees her bite her lip. “It’d have to be something pretty serious to not make her head home in weather like this.”

“Maybe she has somewhere to hole up,” says Truce. “At a friend’s?”

“Whose parents aren’t mentioning it? Despite the big search?”

“Has there been that big a search?”

Wendy pulls the file from the capacious handbag sitting at her feet. “Seems like. They’d hardly call us in unless they thought something was very off.”

“I thought being a Justice of the Peace’s daughter might do it,” says Truce.

“How jaded.” Wendy frowns. “I suppose they might, as a token gesture — but that would mean they think she’s not going to be found. Either because she’s successfully run away or ...”

“Because she’s dead and they want someone else to take the heat,” says Truce.

“Exactly.”

“I’m good at tracking people down,” says Truce.

“Even without tracks in the sand?”

“Even then.” Truce’s voice is now cold.

“Sorry,” says Wendy. “I didn’t think.”

“And I don’t want to,” says Truce. “Do you fancy some music?” He doesn’t wait for her reply, but tunes the radio to Classic FM.

They drive on. According to the satnav, in normal weather, the journey takes one hour and twenty-two

minutes. It currently thinks they have an hour and ten to go. Considering the snow is slowing them considerably, Truce thinks they are making as good time as can be expected. They've been on the road about half an hour. So maybe an hour and three quarters to go, he guesses. That's a long time to be in the car with someone who knows him better than he's used to. Someone who knows him almost as well as Leighton.

Truce tries to focus on the road. He's not sure if it's possible but he senses the slippery surface beneath his tyres. He can see Wendy's head is turned away, looking out the window. The scenery is beautiful in a harsh, Dickensian sort of way. Mainly they are travelling through farmland, interrupted every now and then by lines of two-storey stone houses on each side of the road. These contain shops, flats, pubs, town halls and usually end in a church on one side. Once these were all there was of these villages, but even driving through, Truce catches glimpses of newer, frailer, modern housing trailing off behind them. There's no doubt this a rural area, but it's no longer a series of isolated villages. He frequently sees bus stops. He wonders again about why the Specialist Crime Unit has been called in. It can't be that difficult to track down a missing teenager in what has become a reasonably populated area, can it? It's not like this is a metropolis someone could get lost in and nor is it a wasteland. In fact, as he assesses it this seems like the perfect ground for tracking someone. Just a big enough population that something or someone out of the ordinary would be noticed.

"I don't see this as going to be so hard," he says out loud.

"I hope you're right," says Wendy. "It's a difficult landscape to search. If she's been taken."

This is so opposite to what he's been thinking that Truce doesn't know what to say. Wendy has lived here longer, so he assumes she has her reasons. He mulls over what he's

thinking, remembering all the details of his training. It occurs to him that he knows what AWOL soldiers are likely to do. He can get inside their heads. But a teenage girl? He's thinking about what he would do. What does he know about modern teenagers, especially girls? Hell, what did he ever know about teenagers? Leighton and he were always the odd ones out. How much help can he be? He flips from thinking how easy this is going to be to how hard it could be and how helpless he'll feel.

Almost as if she is sensing what he's thinking, Wendy says, "I guess what we'll need you to do is think like the kidnapper, if there is one. That would be playing to your strengths."

He flashes her a confused look.

"It's tactical," she says.

Silence falls between them. Truce feels comforted by what she has said.

"I didn't mean to offend," says Wendy after they've passed through a particularly bleak village. "I'm not suggesting—"

"I know," says Truce, cutting her off. "What you said was helpful."

"Do teenagers display the same body language signs as adults? Can you read them as easily?"

"Honestly," says Truce, "I'm not sure. Why?"

"I was thinking the first place we need to start is her school."

"Not her family?"

"Unless one of her family has taken or killed her, it's more likely kids of her own age will know more about her. At least that's the way it was with me. My parents didn't have a clue about half the stuff I got up to."

Truce grins. "I'd like to hear those stories sometime," he says.

"Maybe, if you're very good," says Wendy. "We must be close by now. I'll look out the details of the B&B." She

checks her watch. "If it's anything like in my day, school will be out by now." She searches on her phone. "We're in somewhere called Bridge of Gertha. Four miles outside St Blaine's. Four rosettes. The department's pushing the boat out. It says ..." Her phone is interrupted by the ping of a message coming in. "Okay, change of plan. We're heading straight to the family. Cooper arrived half an hour ago and has managed to round up some of the kids and teachers from the school. He's checking through their statements." She sighs. "Shit."

"You think he'll get their backs up?"

"He'll almost certainly put them on the defensive," says Wendy. "He's hardly the kid-gloves type."

"Nice pun, I think. A bit off maybe."

He sees Wendy blush faintly. With her colouring the faintest embarrassment shows clearly. "I don't want to go where you're thinking ..."

"Cooper, among all those teenage mini-skirted girls. Sixteen is still the age of consent here, isn't it?"

"He's a prick, but he's a professional prick."

"Won't stop him leering."

"Sadly not," says Wendy. "Still, maybe it'll make them like the two of us more."

"Or be simply disgusted at all police," says Truce. "And if one of them does know something, they've obviously been holding out for a while now."

"So, establishing trust is a big issue," says Wendy. "Shit. Shit. Shit."

"We should sign Cooper up with one of those online dating agencies."

"I like my fellow women too much for that."

"Someone liked him enough to marry him," says Truce. "I mean there are no other obvious attractions, like money or looks."

"That turn," says Wendy, pointing.

“Damn.” Truce goes around the roundabout once more. “I was thinking we were still heading to the B&B. By the way, are we sharing?”

“What do you think?” says Wendy in a neutral tone that leaves him completely baffled.

The road into St Blaine’s is a dual-lane rollercoaster of a ride that ends abruptly in another, and this time much smaller, roundabout. Truce skids the car slightly pulling to a stop at the give way. “Jesus,” he says. “You okay?”

“Hmm,” says Wendy not looking up from her phone. “Go straight over and then take the right exit at the next roundabout.”

“They like their bloody roundabouts,” says Truce. “Is that an indication of something?”

“That most of the civil engineers in the Seventies, when the system was designed, were stoned,” says Wendy. “I mean, have you seen Birmingham? It’s like one of those pictures people made with string. It’s practically crocheted.”

They take a right at the roundabout. The road is steep, but has been cleared of snow, and it’s gritted. “Justice of the Peace, this way,” says Truce. It’s the first clear road they’ve seen.

“Did you not notice the roads have been getting better the further into Perthshire we go?” says Wendy. “They get a lot of snow here all the time. They know how to deal with it.”

“Does that mean the people do too?” says Truce. “That Patricia would know about hypothermia?” It’s the first time he’s said her name and suddenly the case feels real. It’s no longer an abstract problem. Patricia is out there, dead or in distress.

“I expect so,” says Wendy. “In which case she might have used the weather to cover her tracks — literally. Or she might have been so desperate she didn’t care.”

“Same might be said for a kidnapper,” says Truce.

“We should stop trying to make guesses now we’re here,” says Wendy. “Let’s go into the house with an open mind. Go across the next junction. Then, the one after that, turn left into Mardale Crescent. It’s number seventeen.”

They travel up a tree-lined road. Truce notes the trees are old. This part of St Blaine’s is well established. On the way in he’d noticed some modern housing, but there is none now. This must be the area where people with money live. He turns left into Mardale Crescent. On both sides of the road are detached stone houses with front gardens and drives about the length of three cars. The houses look as if they date from the Edwardian or Victorian era. No two are the same.

“Do they know we’re coming?” he says.

“I wouldn’t put it past Rose to have phoned them when we left to say we were on the way.”

“So, they’ll be impatient and irritated,” says Truce. “Maybe we can use that.”

“It’s much nicer working with you than Coop,” says Wendy.

“Thanks,” says Truce. “If I didn’t know him, I’d take that as a compliment.”

Number seventeen has a tall fir tree at the bottom of the lawn. It’s grown and spread over the years, without being tended, and throws the whole front garden and house into shadow. Truce has opted to park on the street. They crunch up a gravel drive towards the door. The building is grey stone, two storeys, with a flat roof and short iron railings along the edge. On one side there is a bay window spanning both storeys. The other side is flat-fronted. A large, black door with a metal lion knocker divides the two sides of the house. There are five stone steps up to the door, swept free of snow. Standing by the door is a constable in uniform. He looks pale and is shivering. Truce notes there is no sign of him being offered tea or coffee by the residents. Or maybe he’s just handed back the mug, he

thinks, trying to be charitable. But he's fairly sure from the man's expression that he's being treated poorly.

"Detective Inspector Truce and Specialist Wendy ..." He blanks, forgetting her surname.

The policeman doesn't notice. He rings a bell on the door frame. "They don't like me using the knocker," he says. "Mr Green is afraid I'll mark the door."

"Great," mutters Truce. "You'd think he would have better things to worry about ..." He's about to say something even more caustic, but Wendy kicks him in the shin and at the same time the door opens.

Standing in the doorway is a short man, no more than five feet six. He is dressed in a green velvet smoking jacket and slacks. A purple ascot shows at his neck. His face is reddish and his nose bulbous. His hair is dark but flecked with grey. It's cut short and is slightly thinning. He has the plumpness that comes from eating out several times a week. Rather like he's eight months pregnant with twins, thinks Truce. His voice, slightly breathless, nevertheless displays the strident tones of a man used to being obeyed, "So have you found my daughter?" he says. His eyes are dry and stony.

"Detective Inspector Truce," says Truce holding out this hand. He lets Wendy introduce herself as he still hasn't remembered her second name.

"Dr Wendy Klein," says Wendy, and he hears a touch of irritation in her voice.

His proffered hand is ignored by Green and Wendy doesn't bother offering hers.

"You took your time getting here," says Mr Green. "I thought you would have news."

"Perhaps we could come inside, sir," says Wendy.

Mr Green snorts. "If you must." He turns and retreats into the hall, leaving them to follow. Wendy and Truce exchange looks.

"I wouldn't want to live here," says Truce quietly.